USA

DOMESTIC POLITICS
ECONOMY
FOREIGN POLICY
JUSTICE
MILITARY
SOCIETY & CULTURE

Also see:

Iraq in Transition

Living > Religion & Ethics

The Monitor Breakfast
Excerpts from discussions between reporters and Washington newsmakers.

BLOG COOK'S CAPITOL

USA Stories:
for 05/26/2005

Beyond the stem-cell showdown

For 2006, Democrats try 'back to basics'

Currency questions intensify between US and China

America's Goliath task of explaining itself

Bullish on housing, no letup in sight

Do US women belong in the thick of the fighting?

USA > Economy
from the May 24, 2005 edition

POLLEN CALLIN': Honey Gardens Apiaries Inc. owner Todd Hardie (standing on the truck) and beekeeper Ross Scatchard unveil an arriving truckload of 420 hives in Charlotte, Vt. The bees were returning from warmer climes: they'd spent the winter in South Carolina.
ALDEN PELLETT/AP

Bees, please: why farmers are buzzing for more hives

By Patrik Jonsson | *Correspondent of The Christian Science Monitor*

CLAYTON, N.C. — Ever since he found some old hives in his grandfather's Pender County barn when he was a teenager, Richard Uzzell has had bees on his mind.

A few weeks ago, all grown up with three kids and a wife, he fulfilled his boyhood wish: He bought two queens and six pounds of worker bees. "Just what I've always wanted: 40,000 free employees," says the high-school Russian teacher, emerging from a cloud of bee-calming smoke.

His hives here in Clayton will, if nothing else, keep his family in honey for the winter. But amid one of the worst-ever

In the Monitor
Thursday, 05/26/05

A violent street finds

Don't Cross This Space Frontier

Pure Water Makes Good Neighbors

Global waves from a Europe adrift?

Ladies, start your engines

Heat turns up on US rights abuses

.....

XML What is this?

SPECIAL PROJECTS

 Decision2004

 Empire Builders

 September 11 One year later

 Defining Terrorism

 Amtrak: All Aboard?

 My Fellow Americans...

 The Heart of a High School

more projects...

Most-viewed stories:
(for 05/25/05)

05/26/05
Beyond the stem-cell showdown

05/25/05
How Senate fracas may shape '08

05/25/05
From Senate strife, a center takes hold

05/25/05
Immigrants' second wives find few rights

05/25/05
Venezuelans see some 'Don Quixote' in their populist leader

winters for bees - ravaged by mites, half of America's 2.5 million colonies perished - he's helping to solve a quiet agricultural crisis.

Like Mr. Uzzell, many Americans are lining up to ease a looming pollination problem, tugged by the promise of honey money and an agri-patriotism: The struggling bumblers pollinate $15 billion worth of agricultural products in the US every year, a critical link in the growing cycle of everything from cantaloupe to tomatoes. Easily domesticated, and crowding into hives by the tens of thousands, honeybees are perhaps the world's perfect pollinators, and their shortage has farmers scrambling.

"The beekeeping situation has got some real problems and the repercussion of that could be ... consumer concerns," says Don Hopkins, North Carolina's state apiarist. "We're trying to increase the supply of bees and at the same time increase the number of [parties interested] in keeping bees."

'Go West, young bee'

The stakes were raised this winter, when Asian "vampire" mites, grown immune to pesticides, ravaged the hibernating hives. In Pennsylvania, some farmers opened their hives this spring to find that 75 percent of their bees had perished. Florida, where beekeepers send their hives for the colder months, took a huge hit. Orange-grove owner Rob Dye says he's lucky that a friend put a couple of hives at the edge of his 40 acres. "There have been no bees on that property for some time," says Mr. Dye.

Always excellent pollinators - they gather in large numbers and, once domesticated, easily withstand being transported to farms in need - the honeybee is in higher demand than ever. Many beekeepers who normally winter their bees in Florida have instead shipped them to California, where almond growers are paying triple the usual hive fee to have bees in residence.

But despite that call of "Go West, young bee," California farmers are bracing for a 16 percent decline in almond yields, according to the US Department of Agriculture's California Statistical Office.

It's a similar situation in North Carolina, a state that is shifting from greenhouse-planted tobacco (which doesn't need bees to flourish) to large tracts of monoculture crops, such as cucumbers or strawberries, which flower to fruit and require bees for pollination.

calm

Beyond the stem-cell showdown

Africans ask: 'Why isn't anyone telling the good news?'

Do US women belong in the thick of the fighting?

COMMENTARY: America's Goliath task of explaining itself

Read these and the rest of the Monitor's headlines by e-mail. Subscribe for free.

E-mail this story

Write a letter to the Editor

Printer-friendly version

Permission to reprint/republish

Now the state is using tobacco-settlement money to promote beekeeping.

To be sure, honeybees aren't the only pollinators in their field: Butterflies, moths, and garden flies - just about any insect that likes the taste of nectar - are helpful, too. But easily domesticated honeybees, by virtue of their sheer numbers, are the farmer's best hired hand. With up to 80,000 individuals per hive, busy worker bees flower-hop for nectar, spreading pollen from plant to plant in the process, which allows the flowers to turn into fruit. And by letting farmers focus an overwhelming number of insects on a specific area, honeybee pollination brings about both better quality and bigger yields of fruit and veggies.

Jerry Hayes, Florida's beekeeper in chief, well understands the hardship of a hive shortage. "We can't keep this up for long," he says. "If honeybees ceased to exist, two thirds of our citrus would disappear."

'To bee or not to bee'

In part because of publicity about the shortage, in part because of the allure of apiary adventures, there's a faint buzz of hope: While bee laboratories struggle to find new "mitecides," some states are starting to subsidize beekeeping, and potential beekeepers are swarming to sign up for classes such as next weekend's "To bee or not to bee" course in western North Carolina.

In Jackson, Miss., more than 100 people attended a short course on beekeeping last weekend - a huge crowd at a bee class, says Harry Fulton, president of Apiary Inspectors of America. A program to study and introduce Russian and Italian bee queens at North Carolina State University had hundreds more applicants than there were free hives.

FOR HIRE: Honeybees huddle on a comb in Charlotte, Vt.
ALDEN PELLETT/AP

"There were a lot of disappointed people who didn't get into that program," says Angel Johnson of Brushy Mountain Bee Farms in Moravian Falls. One North Carolina beekeeping association has reported a doubling of members this spring.

A state of small beekeeping operations, Kentucky is making it easier to get into beekeeping and expand existing operations. Using tobacco-settlement money, the state has bought dozens of honey extractors that small beekeepers can easily get to and use: "We're seeing people expand operations that wouldn't be expanding [otherwise]," says Phil Craft, the state's bee inspector.

As he looks over his new honeycombs, Uzzell, the rookie beekeeper in North Carolina, is happy to discover that his buzzing subjects have

accepted the new queen he recently introduced. "These hives are self-serving to an extent, but they're also good for North Carolina agriculture, and I take some pride in that," he says.

Links of interest

- Travel: Creative folk push the boundaries of art
- Religion in the public square in the USA, Iraq, and Uzbekistan
- Does your job pay well? Check salaries for hundreds of job titles in dozens of cities

Most-viewed stories (for 05/25)

- Beyond the stem-cell showdown (05/26/05)
- How Senate fracas may shape '08 (05/25/05)
- From Senate strife, a center takes hold (05/25/05)
- Immigrants' second wives find few rights (05/25/05)
- Venezuelans see some 'Don Quixote' in their populist leader (05/25/05)

E-mail this story | Write a letter to the Editor | Printer-friendly version | Permission to reprint/republish

back to top

Home | About Us/Help | Feedback | Subscribe | Archive | Print Edition | Site Map | RSS | Special Projects | C
Contact Us | Privacy Policy | Rights & Permissions | Advertise With Us | Today's Article on Christian Science | We